Abandoned Hospitals

Throughout the world there stand many abandoned structures that were once used as a hospital, whether that time was many years ago or it has been abandoned recently the abandonment of such structures should be seen as tragic. Previously these buildings had been used to save lives and now they stand abandoned and without a purpose also leaving certain areas with no hospital and a longer travel time in order to get to one. Hospitals serve more of a purpose than just a building where people go when unhealthy. Apart from the real problem, the architecture behind hospitals is remarkable and these buildings should be preserved so we can fully appreciate the design and the thought put behind the structure of the building and there are many examples of beautiful architecture in hospitals throughout the world and each has a unique aesthetic. These buildings may be abandoned for a wide variety of reasons and these hospitals have become a major theme in Ruin Porn in recent years, with many urban explorers exploring these hospitals and taking pictures of the inside and outside.

The advancements of architecture and engineering since Medieval times has allowed for countries to create very tall, magnificent buildings and most certainly make use of these advancements. Hospitals are a building that benefitted from these advancements and grew very much in size and have benefitted in other ways. For example, a study done by Mary Ann Hozak, John Nelson, and Debbie Gregory found that hospitals that had undergone major architectural change in the last five years had increased patient and workers job satisfaction which resulted in
more lives saved and a better experience for the patients overall (Hozak, Nelson, and Gregory 11). Architecture has come a long way since the medieval times, for example, a medieval hospital in Winchester in the United Kingdom has come a long way since it was first constructed. According to the Department of Archaeology at the University of Winchester, there is a hospital called the St Mary Magdalen that was constructed in the Medieval times and has since been changed many times and even repurposed. The building's foundation is believed to have been laid in the 11th century and its oldest documented use was as a hospital for those with leprosy in the 12th century. This 12th century hospital was very basic and structure and consisted of solely a small chapel and a graveyard accompanying it for those who succumbed to leprosy. It was later partially demolished and rebuilt in the 16th century and brick-built almshouses were built and the original chapel was left standing as well (Roffey, Tucker 170-171). The basic structure of a small hospital is described in detail and gives an idea of what architecture used to be like and how small buildings used to be. In contrast, the structure of a modern hospital is described by Sally Shoemaker and Willo Pequenat in their paper as much larger and not just a small chapel as there are many departments for everything in a hospital such as a surgical ward, intensive-care ward etc (Shoemaker, Pequenat 168). One can conclude that due to the need of more rooms in a building then the building would be much larger. In addition to the previously mentioned hospitals, there are many hospital ruins that offer an insight into the past and inspire minds in the present.

Throughout the world there are many abandoned hospitals and many of them look similar to scenes in a horror movie inspiring ghost stories and leading to many claiming these locations are haunted. The first example of an abandoned hospital to be discussed is the Blue Hospital of Bugojno and is described by James Frank as a “hulking structure” and standing below the
structure was overpowering (Frank, 8). The Blue Hospital was a hospital in construction that was never finished and was left standing in ruin. Frank says what drew them to the hospital was the combination of the aesthetics of ruin and decay of the hospital. Also, Frank talks in detail about how the beauty of the surrounding natural landscape was also a factor in selecting this site to study. The ruin’s Hospitals can be seen as a metaphor for many things. As for this hospital, Frank states that, “The ruin seems doubly burdened as physical reminder of not only another time and social dynamic, but of lost prosperity and optimism” (Frank, 12). Frank also discusses reusing the space and suggests making use of a ruin by suggesting that its roof can be used to collect water and areas within the structure can store the water. Also he suggests that the rooms that were intended to be hospital rooms could be used as greenhouses and lower levels of the building could be used as a place to grow edible fungi (Frank, 132). Overall, in his work Frank talks about an abandoned hospital in Bosnia & Herzegovina and discusses what drew them to studying the building and suggests a purpose for the abandoned structure. Another example of an abandoned hospital is Zofiówka which was abandoned during World War II. According to a paper by Mary Seeman, Zofiówka is a hospital in Otwock Poland that was a psychiatric hospital during World War II and in the year 1939 most patients were exterminated by German soldiers. The hospital was then a place for pure, pregnant Aryan women to be housed before giving birth in the years 1943 to 1945. After 1945 it was once again a psychiatric hospital until 1998 when it as abandoned (Seeman 100, 102). Since it was abandoned it has become a hotspot for tourists, photographers, urban explorers and anyone with an interest in the paranormal. Many claim to hear moans and shrieks in the ruins after dark and believe the ruins are haunted (Seeman 102). It is tragic that hospitals must shut down, although losing some of these care-taking facilities is not a terrible thing.
Throughout the course of history there have been many hospitals and most have not been around for long as many have had to close for one reason or another. According to an article on the Roosevelt Island Historical Society website a smallpox hospital was built in 1854-56 along with many other buildings that specialized in treating certain illnesses. According to the article, these hospitals were shut down due to becoming obsolete and inadequate. These hospitals did not fit the needs of the area or were not used enough to keep open. Due to this, these smaller branches were shut down and consolidated into a bigger hospital that was built in Queens New York. All of the other smaller, older hospitals were left in ruin (Roosevelt Island Historical Society, 1). Another example of a hospital closing was due to its declining reputation, the Northville State Hospital. An article on the website Opacity tells the story about the Northville State Hospital being opened in Michigan in 1952 and was considered to be a cutting edge hospital and consisted of 20 buildings. The building contained 650 beds and also contained over 1000 patients and overcrowding was a big problem. In 1983 the hospital was found to be guilty of “warehousing” patients which is leaving patients idle or to watch television on heavy medication, it was also reported that assault, neglect, rape, racism, and escapes were commonplace all of which hurt the reputation of the hospital, resulting in the decline in its population (Opacity 1). All of these abandoned buildings make for good pictures and stories, which is why the have become a big part of the urban exploration community.

Without these abandoned buildings such as the abandoned hospitals there would be no “Ruin Porn” and fewer places for urban explorers to go. An article by Simon Carter talks about abandoned hospitals in the urban exploration community. He explains that recently urban exploration has grown in popularity in all media. Within the article, Carter reasons that the reason that hospitals are so popular is because it may remind us of the future if we fail to keep
our healthcare out of the hands of the greedy. Carter explains that people may look at abandoned hospitals as a sight into the future if society keeps headed in the way it is now (Carter 4). Carter is saying that people should look at abandoned hospitals as a warning of what is to come and to heed that warning. In another perspective, Sammy Medina writes about an urban explorer named Jeremy Harris who explores abandoned hospitals and asylums for fun. Jeremy Harris chooses to document these buildings to shed light on an important but neglected part of American history, and explores the huge buildings known for their size and structural innovations and its contents in a hope to reconstruct a sense of each place and of the materialistic conditions of the lives of the people who passed through the halls of each asylum (Medina 1-2). Medina asked urban explorer Jeremy Harris why he cared to visit and document these places and Jeremy does his part because he wishes to teach people about how life was in the hospital. Lastly, a third explanation of abandoned hospitals in the urban exploration community is given by Eric Distad in his paper and explains that urban explorers choose to explore sites such as abandoned hospitals because it gives the explorer an opportunity for existential reflection and helps develop an understanding of how one’s inner, subjective experience can influence in what they see within these buildings and that the explorer wishes to see the mystery firsthand and draws them to explore the site (Distad 11-12).

These large, magnificent structures offer a chance to appreciate how far architecture has come and appreciate the thought put behind the building, this sort of example is seen in many different cases throughout the world. They are abandoned for a variety of reasons and their abandonment offers urban explorers a chance to come and explore what has become a mystery and document how life used to be within the walls giving us a glimpse in the past that is not written in a history book. Although there are many different types of ruins to explore, abandoned
hospitals may be the most interesting due to their stories and the mystery within. Exploring ruins may be one of the most educational and interesting things one can do in life and everyone should take a chance to explore should they get the chance.
Works Cited


